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SOME STUDENT UNDERTAKINGS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT TEACHERS COLLEGE

AGNES WILSON

In the face of the gigantic divisions that are rending the Modern World we have no alternative but to begin right now an educative process which shall transform into constructive co-operation any forces of division and misunderstanding which lie nearest to ourselves. Such was the thought of Dean James Russell speaking at a banquet of somewhat unique interest, where Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant Students of Columbia University came together to gain a better understanding of their various aims and activities. Since that date a year of successful experiment has carried forward a project initiated by the students themselves in Teachers College. This was the forming of a religious federation for the purpose of mutual understanding, mutual helpfulness, and JOINT undertaking of all activities for the College in which they felt it possible to unite.

There followed a common secretary and common offices, where natural intercourse led to its usual result of interest and friendly contact. Points too numerous to mention were found, where the work of each not only did not suffer but gained vastly through the greater efficiency and better spirit of co-operative effort. Welcoming new students, social affairs, neighborhood visiting, settlement work, general practical service in the College, these brought together and brought out individually the members of the four organizations and stimulated the interest of faculty and students alike by this practical working exhibition of the unifying power of common purposes.

Each has, at the same time, preserved intact its own individuality, held its own meetings, classes, and separate activities. At a recent gathering of the executive heads it was stated that the working together had indeed brought a deeper understanding to each group of the essentials and contribution of its own faith, in addition to the marked increase in understanding and appreciation of the others. This was crystallized, perhaps, for all in a series of Chapel services, given over to the students. Problems of Religion and Nationalism, Religion and Education, were taken up in turn by Jewish, Catholic and Protestant representatives. Such men as Rabbi Wise, George Albert Coe, Father Pace of Catholic University at Washington could not but bring each a distinct and suggestive contribution, as they took up these

great questions of the day from the definite standpoint of that body of thought and practice within which they stood. To those most actively engaged in furthering the success of the undertaking, it has become evident that this has not been merely the accomplishment of certain external things, but has been all along a truly educative process — education in more than religious toleration, education in that further step of uniting in active co-operation rather than scattering all the force which the religious motive gives for the betterment of every community.

To be a real educational factor in the life of the College, it may be said, has always been the purpose of that organization which has had the longest and most complete development, the Y. W. C. A. This is the aim, not alone in meetings and classes but in every form of activity engaged in, especially the committee work, so often relegated to the rank of necessary evil or convenient machine. A large portion of members serve in one such capacity or another, and the success of the whole is only ensured when each of the smaller groups serves as a training ground developing capacity of working well together, for that real christian fellowship and understanding which alone make a real *Christian Association*.

Among the modern Christian movements which the Association especially tries to bring before these future teachers is that of Religious Education. Several years ago it undertook to conduct a Sunday school with modern ideals and methods for the orphans of St. Mary's Home. A considerable staff each year became wholesomely infected with broader and more thorough conceptions of religious training as they tried to work out a hard problem under the kind supervision of friends at Union Seminary and later of the Religious Education Department of the College.

A new experiment has just been undertaken for the coming year, that of working out a week-day program of religious training for the children of a large neighborhood church. There are problems which offer a stimulating challenge to all the available initiative and consecration: the adjustment in time, not one of the least to be reckoned with, with Public School hours and College schedules, the task of organizing curriculum and activities, the provision for necessary correlation with Sunday work, the mixing of children from widely different social classes. It is hoped that many more than those engaged in the new project will become interested and intelligent on a question of such growing importance in the Church to-day.